

REMARKS

By the present amendment, claim 1 has been amended by incorporating therein the subject matter of claims 3 and 4, and by reciting that an arbitrary point on the film is impregnated in the swelling bath for a total length of time of from 63 to 120 seconds. Support for the added recitation is found in the original application, in particular in Examples 2, 3, and 7.

Claims 2-7 and 19-30 have been canceled.

Claims 1 and 8-18 are pending in the present application.

In the Office Action, the restriction requirement is maintained and made final.

Claims 19-30 have been canceled by the present amendment,. Accordingly the restriction requirement issue is moot.

Next, in the Office Action the following rejections are made:

- Claims 1, 3-8, 10, and 14-17 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as obvious over Ikemoto et al., JP10-153709A ("Ikemoto"),
- Claim 9 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as obvious over Ikemoto in view of Sanefuji et al., US2002/0001700A1 ("Sanefuji"),
- Claim 11 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as obvious over Ikemoto in view of Harita et al., US2001/0024322A1 ("Harita"),
- Claim 12 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as obvious over Ikemoto in view of Burger, US3,492,185 ("Burger"), and

- Claim 13 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as obvious over Ikemoto in view of Kondo, JP2000-147252 ("Kondo").

It is alleged in the Office Action that Ikemoto teaches the method of claim 1 except that Ikemoto "doesn't explicitly teach" the feature "within a time up to when swelling reaches the saturation state," but that Ikemoto concerns polarization films that are "wrinkle free" and describes "general problems involved with swelling and the transport of swelled films, as well as a range of film submergence," so that this feature is an obvious optimization (see Office Action at page 4).

Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections is respectfully requested. In the presently claimed invention, a time for impregnation in a swelling bath is reduced and a time up to when a polymer film is brought into contact with the first guide roll in an impregnation bath is reduced largely with respect to the impregnation time (about one-fifth of the impregnation time). These features of the present invention are not taught or suggested in Ikemoto.

The system of Ikemoto uses a swelling bath containing boric acid. This addition of boric acid to the swelling bath is a time-consuming and costly additional step in the process of Ikemoto. Conversely, reducing production time would have had an advantage of improving the productivity of the Ikemoto process, but it would have contradicted any intended benefit of Ikemoto's boric-acid containing swelling bath. Thus, Ikemoto is clearly not aware that reducing an impregnation time may suppress variations in a polarizing film, otherwise the time-consuming and costly step of adding boric acid would be un-natural for Ikemoto.

Further, more specifically, it appears from Ikemoto that some particular reason may have hampered any effort of Ikemoto to reduce the impregnation time. For example, Comparative Example 1 of Ikemoto shows an impregnation time as short as 94 seconds, resulting in the occurrence of display unevenness when the polarizing film obtained by this comparative example is used (see Ikemoto at Table 1).

In addition, Ikemoto explains in paragraphs [0032] and [0033] that the formation of wrinkles depends largely on the concentration of boric acid in a swelling bath rather than on the impregnation time (which, in these Examples, is 4-5 minutes). Thus, contrary to the interpretation in the Office Action, Ikemoto does not teach that a time for impregnation in a swelling bath is generally related to the formation of wrinkles. Rather, Ikemoto explains that a time for impregnation in a swelling bath is NOT related to the formation of wrinkles. In other words, the practical and theoretical teachings of Ikemoto do not provide any motivation or incentive to arrive at the present invention.

In contrast, in the presently claimed invention, not only the impregnation time is reduced, but also a large reduction in time is achieved up to when a polymer film is brought into contact with the first guide roll in an impregnation bath with respect to the impregnation time. An advantage of these features is it is possible to produce a polarizer that allows display unevenness to be suppressed. The features of the presently claimed invention are not taught or suggested in Ikemoto, and the other cited references fail to remedy the deficiencies of Ikemoto. Therefore, the

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present claims are not obvious over Ikemoto taken alone or in any combination with the other cited references.

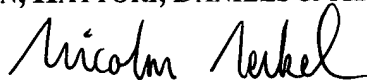
In conclusion, the invention as presently claimed is patentable. It is believed that the claims are in allowable condition and a notice to that effect is earnestly requested.

If there is, in the Examiner's opinion, any outstanding issue and such issue may be resolved by means of a telephone interview, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned attorney at the telephone number listed below.

If this paper is not timely filed, Applicant(s) respectfully petition(s) for an appropriate extension of time. The fees for such an extension or any other fees that may be due with respect to this paper may be charged to Deposit Account No. 50-2866.

Respectfully submitted,

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